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INDO-GERMANIC RELATIONSHIP TERMS AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

By W. D. WALLIS

PERHAPS, a comparative study of social life, like charity, should begin at home, but it never does begin there. We first search far afield for our material before weariness brings us home. This, at least, has been the story of relationship terms. We first became aware of the importance of kinship terms among savages and then discovered that the problem lay nearer home, and in much the same form. For this the anthropologist may find fault with the students of European philology who might have gotten some inspiration for the task had they been familiar with the contributions in this field coming from an allied quarter. It must be confessed, however, that the students of European philology hold a similar brief against the anthropologists. In 1890, and again in 1895, Delbrück pointed out the importance of Indo-Germanic kinship terms as possible evidence of earlier social conditions, and O. Schrader later emphasized this point. But except for Rivers' article in volume VIII of Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, the anthropologists seem either to have overlooked or to have disregarded these important contributions. Morgan's earlier and incomplete account of them seems to have stimulated no further research in that quarter, as both Schrader and Delbrück seem unaware of his contribution.

In the following account we propose to deal more especially with the Greek, Roman, and Teutonic terms of relationship. We shall first give some account of the terms that were used and then attempt to determine to what extent, if any, the kinship distinctions reflected distinctions current in the social or political life of these respective peoples.

LATIN RELATIONSHIP TERMS

As was pointed out by Morgan, the Romans had distinctive

terms for ancestors, both male and female, to the sixth degree. These were:

<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
pater	mater
avus	avia
proavus	proavia
abavus	abavia
atavus	atavia
tritavius	tritavia

Similarly, in the descending line they recognized descendants to the sixth degree:

<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
filius	filia
nepos	neptis
pronepos	pronepthis
abnepos	abneptis
adnepos	adneptis
trinepos	trineptis

Remoter ancestors were spoken of indiscriminately as *maiores*, and remoter descendants as *posteriores*.

The importance attaching in the social and religious life to ancestors, and scarcely less, as among the Jews, to descendants as well, may account for this extensive terminology. Nor is the validity of this social-religious causation set at naught by the fact that the ancestor-worshipping Chinese, like the ancestor-respecting and descendant-hungry Jews, have specific terms for only three generations of ancestors, and as many for descendants. The motive is none the less a real one though it is not always followed to its logical conclusion.

The maternal-paternal distinction is recognized, and uncles and aunts are traced to the fourth degree:

<i>Paternal uncles</i>	<i>Maternal uncles</i>
patruus	avunculus
patruus magnus	avunculus magnus
propatrius	proavunculus
abpatrius	abvunculus

Paternal aunts

amita

amita magna

proamita

abamita

Maternal aunts

matertera

matertera magna

promatertera

abmatertera

A descriptive terminology carries the distinction still further. A nephew is referred to as either *fratris filius*, or *sororis filius*, related to me through my sister or through my brother. Cousins are *fratres patruels* if their fathers are brothers, *fratres consobrini* (or *consororini*) if their mothers are sisters. They are *fratres amiti* if the father of one is the brother of the other's mother, that is, if the parents through whom the relationship is traced are of different sex. The children of cousins german, that is, those whose fathers are brothers or whose mothers are sisters, call each other *sobrinius* or *sobrina*. To the cousins german of my father or of my mother I use the term *proprior sobrino*.

In addition to the above we find the following terms:

nurus, wife of son, of grandson, or of great grandson.

levir, husband's brother.

janitrices, husband's brother's wife.

enater, husband of deceased sister.

socer, father-in-law.

glos, husband's sister.

fratria, brother's wife.

The writer has not been able to discover any terms for such relationships on the side of the wife. This emphasis of the relationship on the side of the husband is what we might expect in a society where the wife joins the husband's people, is under their jurisdiction and is brought into constant association with them.

In Roman law descent of property was counted solely through the paternal relatives until the pretorian law introduced succession based on blood relationship and Justinian finally removed all agnatic prerogatives. The relationship terms subsequently lost their connotation of maternal or paternal, though whether this loss of distinction was directly related to the loss of paternal privileges is a matter we have been unable to determine. The answer awaits one who is qualified to investigate this special field.

GREEK RELATIONSHIP TERMS

In Greek we find similar distinctions, the parents of the Latin terms, which have, in most instances, been derived from the Greek, often without change of meaning.

The maternal-paternal distinction is clearly observed. *θεῖος*, mother's brother; *πάτρως*, father's brother; *πατροκασιγνήτος*, the son of father's brother. Brother and sister are called *ἀδελφός*, and *ἀδελφή*, respectively, the maternal relationship being connoted in the stem *δελφός*, meaning "womb." The son of a brother or of a sister is called *ἀδελφιδέος*, and a daughter of brother or sister is called *ἀδελφιδῆ*. Thus the terms for nephew and niece preserve the common connotation of relationship through the same female ancestor. Again, in the word *πασίγνητας*, meaning a brother by the same mother (from *ἀγάστωρ*, from the (same) womb), we find the emphasis placed on relationship through the female line. This became the *agnatio* of Latin, which there meant, not maternal but paternal relationship, suggesting a change in the method of reckoning descent, though there seems to be no historical evidence on the point.

The maternal-paternal distinction is continued in the terms:

<i>μητρομήτωρ</i> ,	mother's mother.
<i>πατρωμήτωρ</i> ,	father's mother.
<i>πατρωπάτωρ</i> ,	father's father.
<i>μητροπάτωρ</i> ,	mother's father.
<i>μήτρως</i> , <i>μητράδελφος</i> , <i>μητροκασιγνήτος</i> ,	mother's brother.
<i>πάτρως</i> , <i>πατράδελφος</i> , <i>πατροκασιγνήτος</i> ,	father's brother.
<i>πατροκασιγνήτη</i> ,	father's sister.
<i>μητροκασιγνήτη</i> ,	mother's sister.

In the earlier literature the distinction is clearer than in the later literature. Thus, in the *Iliad* we find *μήτρως*, and in Pindar *μητραδελφείος* used to denote mother's brother, and *πάτρως* to denote father's brother. They were replaced in the later literature by *θεῖος*, which referred to any uncle.¹ There was the same loss of the distinction formerly observed between maternal and paternal aunts; and between maternal and paternal grandparent, *πάππος*, in Plato

¹ *πατρός-θεῖος* was used for paternal uncle.

referring to a grandfather of either line. *πατρικός*, or *πάτρικος*, 'derived from one's father,' came to mean hereditary—our 'patrimony.' *ῥίκος* was a term used to include the four generations composing the family group.

In addition to the above we find the following terms:

νύος, daughter-in-law; bride; wife; any female related by marriage.

ἐκνός, step-father; father-in-law.

πενθερός, father-in-law; brother-in-law; son-in-law; any male related by marriage; plural, parents-in-law.

δαήρ, husband's brother.

γάλως, husband's sister; brother's wife.

πενθερά, mother-in-law. Derived from *πενθέω*, to lament, to bewail.

ἐνάτερες, reciprocal term used by the wives of brothers. (Liddell and Scott, 8th edition, adds, "or of husband's brothers," which means presumably, a woman and the wife of her husband's brother). This term seems to be derived from *ἐνάς*, ninth day.

ἀέλιοι, reciprocal term used by the husbands of sisters.

πενθεριεύς, step-father's son.

ἐκυρα, mother-in-law.

γαμβρός, son-in-law; sister's husband; wife's brother; father-in-law; any male related by marriage.

πηδεστά, son-in-law; father-in-law.

ἀνεψίος, cousin; nephew. From this (?) is formed *νέποδις*, 'descendants.' (Cp. Sanskrit, *napot.*)

μητρυνία, *πατρός*, or *πατρυνός*, step-father, was equivalent, in adjectival form, with 'unkindness.'

δμόπαις. (*δμός*, common, joint, *παις*, child.) Twin brother or sister.

δμοπάτριος, (a) born of the same father.

δμομήτριος, (a) born of the same mother.

πάππας = our papa; a term used by a child.

μάμμα = our mamma; a term used by a child. (This and the preceding are represented in Latin.)

θηλύ-παις, a term applied to one who had given birth to a girl.

The terms *μητρυννικός*, named after one's mother, and *κατρυννικός*, named after one's father, were employed only in post-classical times.

The importance of the maternal-paternal distinction is reflected, in Ancient Greece, in the property rights and inheritance rights of agnates and cognates. Adoption conferred, as in Rome, all the rights of blood relationship, but males inherited to the exclusion

of females as far as inheritance could be counted. Demosthenes (46, 18) tells us that if there be no brother by the same father, nor father, nor grandfather on the father's side, to inherit the deceased's property, it goes to the nearest male relative. Whether this nearest male relative is reckoned on the paternal side to the exclusion of the maternal, we are not told. The inheritor of the property becomes, in the absence of nearer relations, the guardian of the woman and must either himself marry her or give her in marriage to some other.

According to Jebb (R. C. Jebb, *Selections from Attic Orations*, p. 381. London, 1906), the Greeks recognized four degrees of kinship, with corresponding inheritance rights. At death, property descended in the following order:

1. To brothers of the same father and to the children of such brothers. This was the first degree of kinship.

2. To sisters having the same father and to their children. The second degree of kinship.

3. To first cousins on the father's side and to their children.

4. To relatives on the mother's side by the same rules of descent that apply to the three classes given above. These constitute the fourth degree of relationship.

Do these terminologies indicate priority of descent through the mother in name or privilege?

Herodotus found among the Lycians, near kin to the Greeks, descent through the mother both of name and of property. The inheritance and the status of the children were traced through her. The Swiss classical scholar, Bachofen (*Das Mutterrecht*, Stuttgart, 1861) championed the theory that women had dominated in the earlier days of Greece and governed the state as well as the home and the farm. He based his argument on traditions that assign to woman a much more important rôle than was permitted her in historical times. One of these traditions assigns to women in primitive Athens the right to vote and to hand on their names to their children. Athene, the foundress, quarreled with Poseidon; the city was inundated, and these exclusive suffrage rights were removed. But, until the time of Cecrops, says the tradition, chil-

dren bore the name of their mothers. The accounts of Amazon warriors also impressed Bachofen, as did the important rôle of women serving as priestesses and the large influence of the female in the Pantheon.

There are evidences, though not completely convincing ones, of female descent in early Sparta. Thus, Herodotus tells us that the kings decide about the maiden who inherits her father's property (matrilineal?) "namely, who ought to have her, if her father have not betrothed her to anyone" (a record of later paternal jurisdiction?). (Herodotus, vol. VI, p. 57.)

Plutarch, however, denies that Aristotle is right in his allegation that Lycurgus

endeavored to regulate the lives of the women, and failed, being foiled by the liberties and command which they had acquired by the long absences of their husbands on military expeditions, during which they were necessarily left in sole charge at home, wherefore their husbands looked up to them more than was fitting, calling them Mistresses. (Lycurgus, 14.)

Further suggestion of maternal descent is found in Lycurgus's alleged decision to avoid all suspicion by leaving the country and traveling until his nephew should be grown up and have an heir born to succeed him. (Plutarch, *Ancient World*, 117 f.)

Mr. Rose has denied that we have any actual evidence of mother-right in ancient Greece (*Folk-Lore*, London, 1911) but more recently Mrs. C. G. Hartley's (*Age of Mother Power*, 1914) has championed the theory of Bachofen. If such a previous system of descent of name was practised we have a rationale of these relationship terms. If kinship was counted only through the mother we would have a system of terms denoting such relationship. If, later, it came to be counted through the father, new terms would be used for the new relationship and the two systems would exist side by side. Even when the importance of this distinction has passed away, the inertia of the language, despite the social changes, would keep the verbal distinction alive for a long time; finally, the verbal distinction dies down to the undifferentiated level reflected in the social system. Such a transition would explain the fact that while brother and sister by the same father might marry, this was

not permitted brother and sister related through the same mother; as also the fact that marital relations between a mother and son constituted incest, but not between a father and a daughter. (Plato; Demosthenes; Euripedes.)¹

GERMAN RELATIONSHIP TERMS

Teutonic peoples once made the distinctions with regard to paternal and maternal relatives, and the words denoting these distinctions have for the most part survived, though the distinctions themselves have disappeared. At the present time *Muhme*, *Tante* or *Base* mean, indifferently, "aunt"; at one time, however, *Muhme* meant "maternal aunt" and *Base*, "paternal aunt." So *Oheim* was "mother's brother"; *Vetter*, "father's brother," both now meaning uncle, either maternal or paternal, as does *Onkel*. *Oheim*, like *Onkel*, is probably derived from *avunculus*, while the common stem in *Vetter* and *Vater* is apparent.

If the etymology of the German kinship terms indicate a history, that history is a curious one. *Oheim* seems related to the Frisian *Ehm*, meaning mother's brother, and both of these to the Gothic *Awo*, "grandmother." *Aidem*, the old German word for "son-in-law," or "father-in-law," later restricted to "son-in-law," seems derived from *ei*, "oath." *Tochterman* also describes the "son-in-law" relationship, but this is a later form. *Enkel*, meaning "grandchild," seems related to the older form *Ahnen*, meaning "ancestors," and to *akna*, the feminine form, which seems cognate with *anus*, old woman.

In other ways, too, the etymological history smacks strongly of matrilineal descent. *Geschwister*, meaning brothers and sisters in the aggregate, is from the same stem as *Schwester*, sister. *Geschwisterkind*, it may be noted, came to mean not only nephew and

¹ In the Gortynian Code, probably of the fifth century, women share better than by the Athenian code. A daughter's portion is one half that of the son; a woman owns her property outright and it can not be taken by husband or children. At her death it is transmitted by the same kinship rules that apply to males. Even so the law showed no preference to males, the property going 1) to children, grandchildren, or great grandchildren; 2) brothers, their children or grandchildren; 3) sisters, their children or grandchildren; 4) next of kin; 5) any one of the family group, *e. g.*, the serfs on the estate.

niece but also first cousin. On this stem are constructed the in-law relationships: father-in-law is *Schwiegervater* (older term *Schwäher*); brother-in-law, *Schwiegerbruder*; sister-in-law, *Schwieger-schwester*; mother-in-law, *Schwiegermutter*; while *verschwiegert*, "be-sistered," means related to. Brother-in-law was denoted also by the term *Schwager*, which had previously referred to father-in-law and son-in-law as well. *Neffe* meant in Middle High German a sister's son, an uncle, occasionally a brother's son, or male relatives in general. Other terms represent a curious grouping, due no doubt to an extension of the original meaning of the term. Thus *Muhme*, which meant originally mother's sister, came to mean a female cousin, a sister-in-law, or any female relation. *Vetter* referred to father's brother, then to father's brother's son (in Middle High German), and later came to mean male cousin, instead of cousin by male descent, as *Muhme* came to mean female cousin, instead of cousin by female descent. *Vettergunst* came to mean nepotism, favor shown to one's relations, and *vetterlich* meant cousinly or cousinlike, a record of the later favoritism shown to this relative, though previously that favoritism had been shown to the father's sister's son. In like manner *Base* was extended to the daughter of the father's sister, to her female descendants, and came to be used for female cousins generally. The father's sister must have been troublesome and a meddler for *basenhaft* acquired the meaning of gossip.

There seems no doubt that the original distinctions were a record of social status. The in-law relationship terms were originally used only by the wife when addressing her husband's kindred, in whose group she had gone to live.

"The Aryan terms for affinities took shape only as applied to the young wife's relation to the kindred of the man into whose home she had come." (O. Schrader, in an article on the Family (Teutonic) in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. v, p. 752.)

It is noteworthy that while there is in early German no term for mother's brother, who was not of the kin group of her children, there is a term for father's brother, who was of the kin group—in Old High German *faturneo*, from Latin *patruus*. The wife used

also the terms *Zeihhur*, husband's brother, and *snura*, daughter-in-law, but no corresponding terms were used by the husband.

In the earliest Teutonic and Slavic dialects there is a special term for widow but none for widower. A distinct status was given the wife of the deceased, inasmuch as she might not marry until the end of a prescribed period, whereas the widower could remarry at any time. Thus the kinship distinction follows in the wake of a social distinction and performs a real service.

According to Karl von Amira (in *Grundriss der Deutschen Rechts*, vol. v), the distinction in early Germanic social life between cognates and agnates had its origin in the blood-bond, *Blutsverband*, which held together those related on the father's side, but did not include the relatives of the mother, who belonged to another blood-bond. In Scandinavia this included the descendants of the four great-grandfathers and four great-grandmothers, all rights being counted through the father's side, and not till this was exhausted, through the mother's side. A narrower group included the "most convivial six hands," *den gesipptesten Händen*, i. e., father, mother, sister, son, daughter, brother, while a broader group comprised also nephews and nieces "in the widest sense"—though von Amira does not explain what he means by "the widest sense." In this group the male descendants of *Enkeln*, father's brother, were called second sons, and were included in the first *Knie*, as were also the male ancestors of grandparents, called second fathers. The children of *Geschwister* and the *Geschwister* of parents were reckoned in the first *Knie*.

(The view, that these distinctions in kinship terminology are closely related to the social conditions and dependent upon the latter, has been advanced by O. Schrader (*Reallex. der Indogermanischen Altertumskunde*, and in *Sprachvergleichung*) and by Berthold Delbrück (*Die Indogermanischen Verwandtschaftsnamen. Ein Beitrag zur Vergleichenden Alterthumskunde. In Abhand. der Philologisch-Historischen Classe der Königl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, vol. II, pp. 381-606, Leipzig 1890. Also, *Das Mutterrecht bei den Indogermanen*, in *Preussische Jahrbücher* (1895), vol. 89, pp. 14-27. See also W. H. R. Rivers' article on

"Mother-Right," in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. VIII.)

There seem, then, two ways in which these distinctions between maternal and paternal relatives can be accounted for. The first supposes a prior matrilineal or patrilineal stage where descent was counted only through one parent. When the descent came to be counted, subsequently, through both parents, the earlier method was supplemented rather than supplanted by the latter and lingered on by virtue of the inertia of language. Finally, the importance of the maternal-paternal distinction died out, and with the rationale, passed away the discrimination which originally was embodied in the terminology. Something of this progress can be traced in Greek, in Latin, and in German.

A survey of the systems of relationship used by various peoples, who are still in the matrilineal stage, shows us, however, that the distinction between maternal and paternal relatives may be made prior to the transition to the paternal. Hence, a double nomenclature cannot be accepted as marking a transition stage, though it cannot be denied that the supplementary patrilineal or matrilineal system paves the way to patrilineal or matrilineal descent and facilitates, even if it does not insure it. The fact that many peoples in the matrilineal stage have the two-fold system of descent is no blow to this argument. Greek myths are as likely to have been called forth by the kinship distinctions as to have arisen out of conditions when mother-descent prevailed.

Another rationale for the distinction will be found if we suppose the people divided into exogamous portions, so that father and father's relations belong to one portion, mother and mother's relations to another. The phratric and gentile systems of Greece and of Rome furnish such conditions; so do the kinship groups or village groups of the Teutons. (There is similar evidence from the Chinese.) The oath or in-law relationship of the early Germans is a good instance of the attitude toward an outsider unless he becomes a sworn kin-man.

Whether such fundamental units of the social organization gave rise to the kinship distinctions, or whether, on the other hand, the

kinship distinctions were primary and fundamental, and so gave rise to organizations which were, originally, only the kin, we cannot, in the absence of evidence, even surmise. It is enough to point out the correlation and the more or less parallel development of the two. Either one of these conditions could easily give rise to the other, and either one may be regarded a logical development from the other. The fact that near relatives, whether counted by paternal or by maternal descent, cannot marry, establishes exogamy, and, of necessity, exogamous groups, so that a restriction in marriage based upon blood relationship through one, or through both parents, lends countenance to a distinction between maternal and paternal relatives. Property rights emphasize the distinction and help to perpetuate it.

In conclusion it may be pointed out that the Teutonic distinctions find their analogue elsewhere in Europe. The old French ballads frequently refer to a preference for a sister's son rather than one's own son, though French does not afford the kinship distinctions that we find in German. In early English, however, we find many similarities to the Teutonic terminologies. Thus, before 1600 niece commonly meant a grand-daughter as well as the daughter of one's brother or sister, or was used to refer to any female relative. It was euphemistically applied to the illegitimate daughter of an ecclesiastic. In the sixteenth century *nepote* was used to refer to a grandson as well as to a nephew. In the seventeenth century the word nephew commonly referred to a grandson. This is probably a survival of the earlier meaning of a descendant of remote or unspecified degree of descent, and in law, a successor; suggesting that the nephew had formerly inherited the property, though neither maternal nor paternal nephew is specified. A record of this preference for the nephew is contained in the meaning attaching at the present time to the word nepotism, a term which was introduced to describe the Popes' and other ecclesiastics' favoritism toward nephews—as well as later toward other relatives—in giving them advancement over others. Again, though in the United States the term aunt is frequently applied endearingly to some elderly woman of no relationship, and often of inferior rank, in Eng-

land it formerly was used of an old woman who was a prostitute or a gossip, the last mentioned meaning being identical with the German *basenhaf*t, derived from *Base*, father's sister.

The English word cousin, also, has had a variety of meanings. In the fourteenth century it referred to any collateral relative more distant than a brother or sister, most frequently denoting nephew or niece. Through the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries it applied, in legal language, to the person of nearest relationship, including direct ancestors and descendants other than parents and children, another suggestion that the original descent of property was to the nephew or niece, since this was earlier the most prevalent meaning of the term. So the phrase "to call cousin" became equivalent to "claim relationship with," and still is current and has this meaning in England. Similarly, cousinage, now obsolete, came to mean kinship, consanguinity, or kinsfolk.¹

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¹ An account of the meanings attaching previously to the English relationship terms will be found in J. A. H. Murray's *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. Oxford.